

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 /066 W

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R 081617Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2764

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 19923

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: ELECTION AMENDMENT PASSES BUT SHOWS CONTINUED
STRAINS WITHIN MAJORITY.

SUMMARY. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PASSED ON JULY 7 THE GOF
BILL WHICH (A) ADDS NICE AND TOULOUSE TO THE LIST OF
CITIES (PARIS, LYON AND MARSEILLE) WHICH WILL VOTE BY
SECTOR RATHER THAN BY CITY-WIDE LISTS TO MUNICIPAL ELEC-
TIONS AND (B) INCREASES FROM 10 TO 12.5 PERCENT THE
MINIMUM NUMBER OF VOTES REQUIRED IN THE FIRST ROUND OF
MUNICIPAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN ORDER TO QUALIFY
FOR THE SECOND ROUND. THE SECOND HALF OF THE BILL
CAUSED A MINI-REVOLT IN THE UDR, REOPENING SOME OF THE
SAME WOUNDS WHICH SHOWED UP BETWEEN THE GAULLISTS AND
OTHER MAJORITY PARTIES DURING THE CAPITAL GAINS DEBATE
LAST MONTH (PARIS 17324). ONCE AGAIN PRIME MINISTER
CHIRAC PROVED HIS WORTH TO THE PRESIDENT IN DELIVERING
THE UDR VOTES NEEDED FOR PASSAGE. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE DEBATE ON THE NEW ELECTION PROCEDURES WAS MORE

IMPORTANT FOR WHAT IT TOLD ABOUT RELATIONS AMONG THE MAJORITY PARTIES THAN FOR ITS CONTENT. GISCARD FIRST BROACHED THE IDEA OF INCREASING THE MINIMUM VOTE FROM 10 TO 15 PERCENT IN HIS APRIL 22 PRESS CONFERENCE; SINCE THEN INTERIOR MINISTER PONIATOWSKI HAS CARRIED THE TORCH. THE OSTENSIBLE REASON FOR SUBMITTING THE BILL WAS, AS EXPLAINED BY PONIATOWSKI, TO ELIMINATE CANDIDATES OF DOUBTFUL REPRESENTATIVENESS, WHOSE PARTICIPATION COULD DISTORT THE RESULTS. THE GOF'S EXPLANATIONS WERE LESS THAN CONVINCING TO MANY PARLIAMENTARIANS, IN PARTICULAR THE UDR, WHO SAW THE BILL AS A MANEUVER TO ENCOURAGE THE GISCARDIANS (IR) AND CENTRISTS TO COOPERATE IN CHOOSING SINGLE CANDIDATES TO RUN IN PRIMARIES AGAINST UDR CANDIDATES. SINCE IR AND CENTRIST CANDIDATES, SO THE UDR THEORY WENT, OFTEN CANNOT MUSTER 15 PERCENT OF THE POTENTIAL VOTERS (WHICH WOULD TRANSLATE INTO 18.75 PERCENT OF ACTUAL VOTERS, GIVEN A 20 PERCENT ABSTENTION RATE), THEY WOULD BE FORCED TO COLLUDE TO MAKE SURE BOTH THEIR CANDIDATES WERE NOT ELIMINATED. COMING AFTER CENTRIST MINISTER OF JUSTICE LECANUET'S SPEECH IN RENNES IN MAY CALLING FOR JUST SUCH COOPERATION AND PONIATOWSKI'S FAVORABLE REPLY, THE BILL GAVE THE UDR ADDITIONAL REASON TO SUSPECT THE MOTIVES OF THE BILL'S PROPONENTS.

2. THE LAW COMMISSION IN THE ASSEMBLY, IN THE NAME OF ITS RAPPORTEUR ANDRE FANTON (UDR), CAME OUT EARLIER THIS WEEK IN FAVOR OF KEEPING THE 10 PERCENT RULE. IN THE FACE OF THIS OBVIOUSLY EMBARRASSING LACK OF SUPPORT BY A LARGE BLOC OF MAJORITY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, THE GOF ARGUED ITS CASE ON THE FLOOR OF THE ASSEMBLY AND IN INDIVIDUAL DEMARCHES. BUT THE ISSUE WAS FAR LESS IMPORTANT TO THE GOF THAN CAPITAL GAINS, AND IN THE END IT SHOWED MORE WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE. 12.5 PERCENT PROVED TO BE THE HAPPY MEDIUM, AND CHIRAC IS GENERALLY CREDITED WITH HAVING PERSUADED MOST OF HIS UDR DEPUTIES TO VOTE FOR THE COMPROMISE VERSION.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE WE DRAW FROM THE DEBATE ON THIS OTHERWISE MINOR ISSUE IS THE FOLLOWING:
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-- THE ASSEMBLY VOTE TWO WEEKS AGO ON THE CAPITAL GAINS BILL, INCLUDING AFFIRMATIVE VOTES BY MOST OF THE UDR, IR AND CENTRISTS, HAS NOT BY ANY MEANS RESOLVED THE MANY DIFFERENCES AMONG THESE PARTIES.

-- THE UDR IS JUST AS DISTRUSTFUL AS BEFORE OF LECANUET, PONIATOWSKI AND THEIR RESPECTIVE SUPPORTERS.

-- THE UDR, BY VIRTUE OF ITS 174 VOTES IN THE ASSEMBLY, CAN STILL PLAY AN INDISPENSABLE ROLE FOR OR

AGAINST A GOF BILL AND HAS SHOWN IT IS PREPARED TO DO SO.

-- PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC HAS DEMONSTRATED TO THE
PRESIDENT FOR THE SECOND TIME IN A MONTH THAT HE CAN
RALLY THE UDR AT THE LAST MINUTE IF THE PRESIDENT'S
LIEUTENANTS ARE ALSO WILLING TO SHOW MORE FLEXIBILITY.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 19923

-- FINALLY, THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE MAJORITY,
AFTER HAVING VENTED ITS SPLEEN, USUALLY COME TO THEIR
SENSES, REALIZE THEY HAVE MORE TO LOSE THAN TO GAIN BY
NOT RESOLVING THEIR DIFFERENCES AND IN THE END VOTE THE
BILL.

4. THE MAJORITY PUT ON ANOTHER RATHER DEPLORABLE DIS-
PLAY OF DIVISION WITHIN ITS RANKS, WHICH THE FINAL VOTE
WILL NOT ENTIRELY ELIMINATE. THE GOF MADE THE SAME MIS-
TAKE IT HAS MADE BEFORE ON OTHER OCCASIONS IN NOT ADE-

QUATELY EXPLAINING ITS BILL TO THE PARLIAMENT OR THE PUBLIC; AND THE UDR, AS WELL AS OTHER PARTIES, HAVE LEFT THE PUBLIC COLD IN WONDERING WHY 12.5 PERCENT IS BETTER THAN THE FORMER 10 PERCENT. PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THE DEBATE IS THAT IT HAS AWAKENED SOME PEOPLE TO REEXAMINE OTHER ASPECTS OF THE ELECTORAL LAWS. SOCIALIST AND COMMUNIST DEPUTIES HAD A CHANCE DURING THE DEBATE TO RAISE AGAIN THE VIRTUES OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. CONFIDENTIAL

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SENTATION. THEY MAINTAINED THAT THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF SINGLE-MEMBER CONSTITUENCIES AND GERRYMANDERING WORK TO REQUIRE AT LEAST TWICE AS MANY VOTERS NEEDED TO ELECT A PC DEPUTY THAN A UDR DEPUTY. THE PRESIDENT HAS PUBLICLY RULED OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH A MAJOR CHANGE IN ELECTION PROCEDURES BEFORE THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF 1978, BUT HE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO AVOID A PUBLIC DEBATE OF THE ISSUE. RUSH

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